



# Grammar Girl: Misplaced Apostrophe Syndrome



Dear Grammar Girl,

The other night I went to dinner with my wife. As we were going into the restaurant, she noticed a sign that said “Kid’s eat free on Tuesday’s.” She stood there and laughed until I thought she would fall down. I asked her why it was so funny, but that started her laughing again so hard that I finally gave up and just dragged her into the bar-b-que joint. I have several questions. First, why was she laughing so hard? Second, why would kid’s only eat free on Tuesdays? Whats wrong with Monday’s or Friday’s? And third, if I don’t have any kid’s, how can I take advantage of specials like these?

Signed,

Billy, from Withlacoochee, Florida

Dear Billy,

Really, all I can say is this: is there really a place called Withlacoochee, and if so, are there alligator’s in your back yard?

No, seriously, Billy, the situation you are describing is commonly known as “misplaced apostrophe syndrome.” Once thought to be rare, scientists now understand that one in four people are seriously affected by MAS. I’ll give you a brief outline of the symptoms and the devastating aftermath of this terrible disorder, but for more in-depth information, I suggest you see your family doctor, or watch the upcoming Discovery Channel special “UnMASKing MAS: Apocalyptic Apostrophe’s (or should it be apostrophes?).” It should be interesting, and I hear it is narrated by John Cleese, who tackles the issue head on, and with typical Monty Pythonesque humor (which also calls to mind whether or not it should be Monty Python’s Flying Circus, or Monty Pythons’ Flying Circus, but as the logo has already been made, I suppose the issue is moot).

Now, on to your symptoms. You, too, may suffer from MAS if you answer yes to two or more of the following questions:

1. I never did know the difference between its and it’s.
2. I wouldn’t know an apostrophe if it bit me on the butt.

3. I had no idea that you misused an apostrophe in the word “alligator’s” in the first paragraph.

4. There are in fact alligators in my back yard, but they move pretty slow, so I don’t worry a whole lot about them.

Unfortunately, MAS is so serious that it can keep you from being a productive member of society. It has torn apart families, and devastated untold millions. I would say your case is very far along, given that you are already experiencing communication difficulties with your wife. In short, your wife laughed so hard because the sign you read could be interpreted to say “Kid is eat free on Tuesday is,” or, since the apostrophe can indicate a possessive as well as well as the contraction of some word combined with “is,” the sentence could also be interpreted as “the non-mentioned and nonspecific possession of some specific kid will eat free on the non-mentioned and non-specific possession of someone else named Tuesday.”

Which is all very confusing, since everyone knows that kids don’t eat anything in restaurants. It is wholly irrelevant to offer to feed children free on any night of the week, as they would far rather push the food around on their plates and whine incessantly that they are full (or thirsty). Thus, the gramatically correct version of the sign would have read, “Sit your kid in one of our chairs and let him or her push their food around free of charge, but only on Tuesday, as we have no desire to hear the incessant whining of your child on any other night of the week, especially on Saturday, when we usually get big tips from people who have no children and are in a much better mood because of it.”

As to your other question (believing I have explained now why your wife was laughing, why kids eat free on Tuesday, and not on any other nights), I am now ready to tackle your third and final question: how can you, having no kids, take advantage of this special?

The answer is, of course, that you cannot, unless you are very short, in which case you probably will have no problem convincing the matre’d that you are under twelve.

At least mentally.

Best of luck to you, your wife, and your backyard gators. And get to your doctor – don’t become just another MAS statistic!

Yours in good grammar,

Grammar Girl



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